

## DECLARATION

OF

## THE LEGISLATURE OF TENNESSEE,

IN

*Regard to the establishment of a naval depot at Memphis.*

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MARCH 2, 1846.

Referred to the Committee on Naval Affairs, and ordered to be printed.

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*A declaration of the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled.*

The General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, recurring to the domestic policy of the federal government, notices, with lively approbation, a law of the last Congress of the United States, establishing a naval depot at Memphis, on the Mississippi river.

This great measure was dictated, it is believed, by the soundest wisdom, and will, if it shall be happily carried out, secure, in time of peace, that preparation for all future emergencies, which will aid the country in averting war, or in avenging its provocations. The location, too, of that depot—as can be easily manifested—is, in the opinion of this General Assembly, aptly and eminently adapted to the advancement and execution of the great objects it was intended to accomplish; the chief of which was the construction and repairs of steamers of war.

Memphis is situated in a temperate and healthful climate, exempt alike from the severe frosts of winter, or the destructive fevers of summer. It is in close contiguity to inexhaustible regions, productive of iron, of stone coal, of hemp, and of wood, and all of easy access by water during the greater part of the year. It must soon overlook the southeastern seaboard, by means of a great Atlantic railroad. It is about midway between the gulf of Mexico and the northern lakes, reaching the former by deep and uninterrupted navigation, and destined, it is confidently hoped, at no very distant day, to communicate with the latter by a ship canal. It is almost midway, too, between the mountains east and west of the Mississippi, which cut off and separate the great “inland basin” of this republic from the ocean slopes on either side of these mountains. The geographical centre thus of the most extensive and fertile valleys upon the earth, Memphis is now, or, at the outside, will, in a few years, become the CENTRE of a great community, whose population, in its rapid and astonishing increase, must far outnumber and double the population of all the residue of the Union. It is at this moment, as it must always be, the most available point for the suc-

Ritchie & Heiss, print.

successful promotion of all the great national purposes designed to be secured by the establishment of a naval depot on the western waters: and this General Assembly repeats a decided approbation of all the steps taken by Congress to advance a policy now so auspiciously begun.

In addition to these grave and weighty considerations, the General Assembly of Tennessee may safely press others, which cannot be prudently overlooked, if it is the desire and intention of the federal government to promote good feelings every where, and to guard the harmony of the country, by dealing out equal and even-handed bounties to all its sections and divisions.

The erection and the future agencies of a naval depot and other useful and important public works on the western waters, will necessarily occasion a more expanded and equitable distribution of the public revenue. Such a policy was loudly demanded by the just rights of the west, and could not have been much longer postponed without weakening to some extent the peaceful and loyal relations that have hitherto so firmly united the American nation. It will diffuse into new channels that wealth which is the product of a general annual tax upon all the people, and which, whenever it can be prudently and properly avoided, should not be too systematically lavished or exhausted upon an older and more regarded division of the Union. Already do we behold a chain of naval depots dotting the bays and harbors of the Atlantic from Portsmouth to Norfolk, and, in their necessary outlay and expenditure, invigorating industry, and scattering yearly large sums of money among a highly favored people. Nor is this fact adverted to in a carping or invidious spirit. These great works are all of them well enough, perhaps, in their particular places; indispensable, no doubt, in their numbers, if not in their confined locality to the public service: and it will become good citizens everywhere, however distantly removed from the immediate advantages they confer, to rejoice in the national utility, and in the increased individual prosperity they impart within the great circle of their influence.

Similar public establishments on the banks of the Mississippi and its great tributaries will carry, with similar benefits and facilities, to a great and growing community, proverbial for its patriotism, but hitherto almost wholly unaccustomed to any participation in the public disbursements. They would stimulate its enterprise by opening new and profitable markets to the labor and the productive energies of that community. They would in no small degree familiarize the public eye with the character and the application of the destructive engines of war, and thereby acquaint a remote but devoted people with the power and defensive force of the government.

The hardy waterman of the Mississippi, already more than half a sailor, trained thus in frequent intercourse with the war ship, the child of his own boasted valley, would imbibe feelings which no recited lesson could inspire; and with the first invitation of his country, he would eagerly walk her decks and peril life in defence of her colors. This brave and patient class of our population already numbers some twenty thousand—they flourish in a growing and instructive school, and will, in all time to come, if properly nurtured, constitute a standing army of peaceful and unexpensive citizens, inured to toil and discipline, and ready at a moment's warning to man a navy, or, if needs be, fill up and recruit our field battalions. Fully impressed with the truth and the accuracy of these reflections, and well aware of their practical value and importance, the General Assembly of Tennessee

has noticed with surprise and regret the sentiments that characterize that portion of the late annual report of the Secretary of the Navy appertaining to the particular branch of the domestic policy which it is the intention of this formal declaration to vindicate and support. That high functionary, while he justly compliments the advantages, and admits the facilities which Memphis presents as a location for the details of the plan proposed for a navy yard at that point, because, as he remarks, "it was framed on a scale of extravagant expenditure"—for this and other reasons, all of which, if true, are easily susceptible of proper and effective remedies, he recommends to the legislature a confined use of the moneys it may appropriate, first, to the immediate construction of a ropewalk, and next, to simple arrangements for building and equipping steamers, for the enlarged designs of a depot, adequate to all the great objects of such an institution. What it is that constitutes the extravagance of their plans remains to be disclosed, and can only afterwards be determined by competent and experienced judges. It is fair, however, to suppose that Congress, in the act of establishing a navy yard at Memphis, knew that the execution of the work might consume years, and would require large sums of money; and it is equally as fair to add here, that the justness of that presumption should have secured the future progress of the work against objections which are mainly bottomed upon its probable expense. Public economy, it is freely conceded, is a commendable virtue, but it must at the same time be as frankly asserted that the frugality which stops to weigh dollars and cents in nicely adjusted balances, when the just claims of any part of the State, or the direct interest of the whole, demands the execution of a measure of policy, sometimes degenerates into a morality of doubtful excellence, and not unfrequently injures, when it aims honestly to protect the country. The recollection of such a virtue has not always heretofore startled the fears of public agents, and sealed the treasury doors. Yearly millions have been appropriated to construct and keep up the navy yards that crowd and ornament the northeastern seaboard, and constantly add capital and energy to its trade and industry.

Its scrutiny in the instance now under discussion may successfully postpone rights and interests that have been already too long deferred. Delay will strengthen their force and give certainty to a final acquisition. If Memphis, in the language of the Secretary, is "in the heart of the country," and on an "ocean river"—if in "building steamships it may compete with Boston, New York, and Philadelphia"—if it lies, moreover, "just below the great hemp growing region"—and if, as may be added with equal fidelity, it lies also just below regions of iron and stone coal, and stands surrounded by interminable forests of finest timber, the national value of the location admits of no prolonged controversy, nor will its future occupation and importance for the great national objects now in question be forgotten or retarded by any scrupulous calculations of money or time.

It is the judgment of the Secretary in the premises, and not his unimpeached patriotism, or his general capacity, which it is the object of this Assembly to controvert.

The legislature of Tennessee, in all proper respect to the persons and opinions of those with whom it may differ, protests against views and considerations so contrary to the spirit and intent of the law establishing a naval depot at Memphis, and so palpably prejudicial to the hopes and just expectations of its constituents. Therefore,

*Be it resolved by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, That the act of Congress of June, 1844, establishing a naval depot at Memphis, was a measure of government, dictated by the soundest views of policy, and founded in a due regard to the best interests of the country, and the long deferred rights of the west.*

*Resolved, That by the plain interpretation of the law, it is the duty of the officers of the federal government, until otherwise ordered or interrupted by Congress, to commence and vigilantly prosecute, by all the means placed at their command, the construction of that depot on a scale commensurate with the spirit and the great objects of the law.*

*Resolved, That the governor of Tennessee be requested to forward a copy of this memorial to each of our Senators and Representatives in Congress.*

**BROOKINS CAMPBELL,**

*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

**H. M. WATTERSON,**

*Speaker of the Senate.*

Passed January 2d, 1846.